A MONUMENT OF

IMPERIAL UNITY.

An Address on the Dominion House Scheme delivered by F. B. Vrooman, B.Sc. (Oxon), Ph.D., before the Progress Club, Vancouver, on the 5th November 1913

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Plea on Behalf of Earl Grey's Scheme for The Dominion House in London by Dr. F. B. Vrooman Before Progress Club.

Need for More Efficient Imperial Life and Closer Unity is Vigorously Emphasised by Speaker.

"The Empire is without a home. It is without monument or symbolism. It is without sign or emblem. There is no one thing upon the face of the earth symbolical of Imperial unity or Imperial dignity. We have neither song nor dream nor poem which a Sir Christopher Wren might have wrought into some deathless form to stand in place of the great emptiness, and which, once and for all, and now and for all time, might utter the aspirations of the democratic Imperialism of the British race, and which might become the greatest imaginable factor in the creation and culture of the 'Empire habit of mind.'"

This eloquent plea on behalf of Earl Grey's scheme of a "Dominion House" in London was made by DR. F. B. VROOMAN yesterday before the Progress Club.

SENSE OF LOSS.

"It is impossible," he proceeded, "for any mere Londoner to experience the sense of loss, not to say of utter vacuity, which oppresses the average Imperial peripatetic when, for the first time (and, perhaps, for all times thereafter), he goes to his Imperial Mecca, as every right-minded, outlying Briton hopes to do at least once before he dies; and, failing this, some, I daresay, hope to do afterwards. How many have been the thousands and tens of thousands, and for how long a time have these denizens of the Outer Empire made these pilgrimages over land and sea, to the opaque atmospheres of their holy places, only with a sense of bitter disappointment, to wander helplessly and hopelessly looking for a shrine! We have gone to the Abbey, or St. Paul's, and have been subdued by the architectural emblems of a nation's aspirations—built in stone. We have gone to Westminster and have found the noble piles which stand as emblems of the gifts of Magna Charta, realised in representative government—that is to say, representative for the space of a few hundred miles from its storied walls. We have gone to the gray and smoky city and, with more or less awe, have looked upon the flat and smudgy building whose roof covers the hoards of England, and we have been inclined to reverse the ancient saying of a good book, and declare that 'where the heart is, there the treasure is also.' We have stood under the shaft of Trafalgar, and we have looked up to the mute figure of one whose voiceless message is that one battle on the sea won the Outer Empire for Britain, and that one ship determined that battle, and that was the ship which held Nelson.

LORD GREY'S CONCEPTION.

"It is a significant oversight that before the brilliant conception of Lord Grey, no Briton had ever before dreamed the dream to enshrine in some form of imperishable beauty the adequate emblem of that larger dream of the British race which has found reality in the greatest political aggregation the world has ever seen.

"If the British Empire, then, is a reality, and if there is such a thing as Imperial unity, or if there ought to be, is it less than tragic that the world is confronted with the evidence of the Empire's loose-jointedness and of the inorganic juxtapositions of so many of its unrelated parts, and that there is no substantial and concrete evidence in the Imperial Capital of that organic unity which marks the direction and aim of our present development?

"Earl Grey describes the scheme for creating the building in Aldwych, and outlines his ideas of the form it should take.

"'The Dominion House should rival in grandeur the Houses of Parliament. At one time, it appeared desirable that the building should culminate in a dome, for the dome is the architectural symbol of the Church and of the Empire. The idea of the dome of Empire resting firmly upon the foundation of the four self-governing Dominions was singularly attractive. Apart, however, from the inadvisability of erecting a new dome in competition with the noble dome of St. Paul's, a little reflection showed that, as the building should be devoted to practical purposes, and as a dome lends itself rather to contemplation than to economic use, the building might more advantageously culminate in a huge British central tower, like the Victoria tower at Westminster, which, 100 or 120 feet square, might rise from the centre of the roof.

"'The roof might be a flat one, and it might be converted into a 2½ acres of roof garden, which, situated above the turmoil of the Strand, would become one of the greatest attractions of London. This central tower might be used for the purpose of an hotel, in which the official representatives of the Dominions might have preferential rights.

"'Ambassadors are able to entertain and lodge Kings and Emperors at their official residence. The

Dominion representatives should be able to dispense hospitality to the most eminent men whom they wish to honour.

"'This huge, palatial building would have to meet not only the office requirements of the Dominions' Governments and of the great commercial corporations of the Dominions, but it should also become a great Imperial business centre and intelligence department, a social centre or club, a clearing house of Imperial thought, and an important connecting link between the Motherland and the great Daughter States.

"'It should contain a spacious banqueting chamber, a theatre and lecture hall, a good library and reading room. The theatre and lecture hall might serve the important purpose of spreading a better knowledge of the Dominions among the British people by suitable entertainments. On the ground floor of the building there might be permanent and temporary exhibitions of Dominion produce, which should stimulate business between Great and Greater Britain.

DOMINION HOUSE.

"'The Dominion House, lying in the very centre of London, would attract not only the serious student, but also the casual passer-by. Its beauty and grandeur would arrest his attention and induce inquiry. Strolling up the Strand, on the way to the theatre, National Gallery, the Houses of Parliament, or St. Paul's Cathedral, he would be arrested by that magnificent building, he would enter it, and the pictures, diagrams, and the exhibits of Dominion produce displayed would give him a good idea of the Dominions, and if he should be a business man, that short visit might lead to business.

"'The Dominion House would not only serve as a connecting link between the Dominion producers and home consumers. It would also serve as a commercial museum, and as the information office for British manufacturers. The two-and-a-half acre basement might contain a permanent exhibition of the manufactured articles sold in the Dominions, such as hardware, machines, electrical fittings, wearing apparel, etc., including particularly articles now sold by foreign countries.

"'London is so poor in great architectural monuments that it would be a calamity,' concludes Lord Grey, 'if the opportunity of acquiring this unique site and of erecting thereon a monument of Empire should be lost, if on the site should spring up a gaudy international hotel, or an assembly of theatres and shops. I see in the vacant Aldwych site a great Imperial opportunity, which, once lost, will be lost for ever.'"

"The project of the Dominion House involves the establishment over and above all else a Centre of Welcome, as the *Daily Telegraph* felicitously phrases it, which should be the architectural masterpiece of the British Empire.

"Here upon two and one-half acres and under one roof, it is proposed that the Empire erect a structure which may be the home not only of all the officialdom of Dominions and provinces, but of a permanent exhibition of the products of the Outer Empire and of the industries of the homeland. Here, doubtless, would be one place to which any Britannic visitor might go and read the paper from his own home town, or write a letter in a place of his own on something of his own, to those also who own it far, far away. Vastly more than an Imperial department store would be the aggregation of raw materials and finished products, and samples of the natural resources from all the outlying British possessions. Among other things, this would be to all intents and purposes a Museum of the Economic Geography of the Empire, and as well an Imperial Board of Trade and Chamber of Commerce. Here on the same two and a-half acres also would be housed all the Lord High Commissioners. Here would be all the Agents-General, all the Emigration and Immigration Commissioners, and, let it be hoped, room enough for a Commissioner of 'Migration within the Empire,' awaiting the day when we are intelligent enough to realise its imperative need. Here might all the Royal Commissions sit which are to deal with purely Imperial subjects and interests. Here, too, let there be a noble hall for the first Imperial Parliament and the Imperial Government (should we ever have one), and should we not, after all, determine to move the Capital of Empire to Vancouver.

LONG-FELT NEED.

"'In Lord Grey's project of the Dominion House is to be found a response to a long-felt need, the importance of which no man can minimise, and the utility of which only time can demonstrate. Rather let us say that there is the fulfilment of an Imperial necessity in this synthetic idea, on both the sentimental and economic side, to which it would be as difficult to find one valid objection as it would be to count the substantial arguments that might be brought forward to justify its realisation.

"It is an anomalous situation that long before this we have not had just such an Imperial Housing. I am sure that we out here are not the only ones who are not proud of the *disjecta membra*, the confusion and circumfusion in the Imperial Capital of the scattered and undignified representations of our Imperial life; nor are we the only ones to whom it has occurred that we have condoned these unmistakable conditions of racial inefficiency.

"This one aspect of the project should appeal to us, then, with the greater cogency, the more we think about it, and that is the organisation and centralisation of Empire. And when I speak of the centralisation of Empire, I hasten in this modifica-

tion to insist that, with centralisation, must always be local autonomy and Imperial representation.

"There is no man, probably, in the British Empire to whom it has not occurred, and upon whom it is not thrust with growing insistency, that the vital Imperial problem of the moment is a more efficient organisation of all the assets of Empire, and this involves an accurate knowledge of our palpable weaknesses, no less than a realisation of the pressing need of all our available strength. Without doubt, we are losing the hardness that made the race of men that made the British Empire.

EFFICIENT IMPERIAL LIFE.

"We are overwhelmed with the luxury of long and unquestioned success, and success is enervating; and we are losing the iron in our blood, and the initiative which has made our race what it is. We are taking too much for granted. We are saying to ourselves: 'Things always have been so, and, therefore, they always will be so." There are serious movements afoot in the outer Empire that call for closer organisation, and a more efficient Imperial life. No close observer can fail to be aware of the pressure in the Dominions, and, indeed, of Great Britain itself, of those widely spread centrifugal forces which have been bequeathed to us by an age of individualism, and which are none the less real because they have not yet found a voice. In the matter of what I might call real Imperial patriotism, also, we are taking too much for granted; but, in addition to this, there is something more dangerous yet in the apathy on the part of large numbers who academically assent to Imperialist opinions, and every few weeks applaud the speakers at Canadian clubs. It is impossible for Great Britain to realise the extent to which the most of the people of the new self-governing States are absorbed in narrow and selfish tasks of their own pursuits, and on the theory that two bodies cannot occupy the same space as the same time, those honest folk are losing public spirit and patriotism by sheer force of their being crowded out by meaner things. The new watchwords of Britannia just now should be: Organisation and Efficiency and Duty, and whatever will tend to give tangible form to these ideas will be of vital use to the Empire.

"In these days of expansion and dispersion, not to say disintegration, I know of nothing that more completely can meet the present Imperial need, or work toward a more comprehensive Imperial purpose than the central organisation and co-relation and housing of the scattered ends of our Imperial life and thought and giving to these 'airy nothings' a 'local habitation and a name.' And I am sure that the Empire, for all time to come would hold premiers and Governments responsible, should they from any personal or other motive attempt to block, or even thwart, the realisation of this pressing Imperial necessity.

"The time has come for us to adopt some new watchwords, and, perhaps, some new ideas. Let us admit it at once, and get ready to meet it—a new era is upon us. Revolutionary changes are in the air, for new and fundamental ideas have taken possession of the great majorities of the world.

"I want to say to you, gentlemen, that this project is one which vitally concerns the permanent interests of British Columbia. Here in Vancouver we understand, or ought to understand, that we have no time to lose in overtaking and guiding the ominous world-movements of the Pacific Ocean. Here is where the Empire will be lost or won. Here is where we are to decide whether the white or yellow man is to be supreme upon this vast water. Here the scattered threads of world politics are to be gathered up and woven into the fabric of Empire, and here is where history shall say, if this is not done, and done at once, that the Empire was lost to the British race. We are facing a critical moment in our own development at this present time, and we ought to know that what we do in the next few years out here—what we do for and with the Empire—is likely to change or settle the direction of events for centuries to come. In proportion as we realise the solemnity of the issue shall we be able to grasp the significance of any and every factor which will, in greater or less degree, help to synthesise the assets of Empire, organise our trade in the mutual interests, gather together and bind our racial enthusiasms into one efficient whole, and prepare ourselves for the task, whatever it may cost us, of establishing our free institutions upon the empty places of our inheritance, and making that land now occupied by Britons free land forever." (Applause.)

Mr. R. W. Holland, the chairman, proposed the following resolution, which was seconded by Mr. Alfred Buckley, and enthusiastically adopted:—

"That the Progress Club of Vancouver heartily and unanimously endorses the project known as the Dominion House on the Aldwych Site in London, and recommend that the trade and professional organisations, provinces, dependencies and Dominions of the Empire support it in every possible way on the grounds set forth by Lord Grey, that it would enable: (1) The Governments of the self-governing Dominions and of their States and provinces to concentrate on one central site their offices, now widely distributed in different parts of London. (2) The attention of the home consumer to be effectively and unpressively focussed on the products of the Dominions Oversea. (3) The manufacturers of the United Kingdom to ascertain and to meet the requirements of Greater Britain."